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TAGS: MARR PTER PGOV I2
SUBJECT: IRAQI MINISTER OF INTERIOR INVESTIGATES ATTACKS,
CRITICIZES POLITICIANS

Classified By: DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S//NF) Summary: Minister of Interior Jawad Bolani told EmbOffs on August 31 that his primary focus now is security leading up to the national election, without which Iraq cannot have an effective democratic process. An important aspect of this to Bolani is the Iraqi government's response to attacks and prevention of future ones, and he laid out for EmbOffs the MOI's extensive investigation into the bombings on August 19. He reported that the MOI assessed Al Qaeda in Iraq to be responsible, not Ba'thists or Syria, and argued that other GOI leaders have made public accusations for political posturing rather than listening to the security experts. Bolani expressed frustration with Prime Minister Maliki for his haste and short-sightedness, which he said weaken the whole government. Bolani also confirmed to EmbOffs that his own political party, the Constitutional Party, is exploring alliances for the upcoming national election. End Summary.

Security Ahead of National Election

¶2. (C) Minister of Interior Jawad Bolani told Pol-Mil Minister Counselor and Political Minister Counselor on August 31 that building capacity in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and its forces is critical to Iraqi stability especially leading up to the national election in January. Without a secure environment, Bolani told EmbOffs, the Government of Iraq (GOI) cannot encourage the public to go out to the polls to vote. Bolani said that in all of his meetings with U.S. officials, he emphasizes that Iraq still faces security threats and that the MOI still needs assistance with capacity development. He said investigations and counterterrorism skills have improved due to the training provided by the U.S.; the MOI now needs training in intelligence as well.

MOI Investigation into Recent Attacks

¶3. (S//NF) Bolani said that the recent bombings targeting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF) were carefully planned and conducted by Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). He said that in record time, the MOI was able to respond by capturing the perpetrators, locating the facilities used to manufacture the bombs, tracking the vehicles, and identifying linkages between individuals involved and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an AQI-affiliated group. Bolani said that all of the evidence collected make clear that the attack was carried out on behalf of ISI and AQI.

¶4. (S//NF) Bolani showed EmbOffs a folder of evidence, including photos of the Iraqi suicide bomber who targeted the MFA and an accompanying memo from the MOI's National Command

Center, which Bolani said was distributed in December 2008, warning that the individual was a potential suicide bomber. The individual had been transferred from Coalition Forces detention at Camp Bucca to GOI custody and then released late last year in the government amnesty, and his family had contacted MOI authorities to report their concerns he intended to commit a violent crime.

¶ 15. (S//NF) Bolani said that the MOI had detained 38 individuals, of which seven were considered directly involved in the attack. Others were the bomber's associates and/or intermediaries, including the man in Mosul who sold the vehicle used in the attack and the man who owned a garage Qvehicle used in the attack and the man who owned a garage where it was subsequently parked. Bolani said that all 38 detained were Iraqis and that the MOI had not discovered evidence that the bomber had spent significant time outside of Iraq. The Minister told EmbOffs he was proud of the way in which his officers carried out their investigation.

Disagreement on Usual Suspects

¶ 16. (S//NF) Bolani said that the MOI's technical analysis did not support a link between AQI and Ba'thists, contrary to accusations by other Iraqi leaders. The MOI does not know the nature of the connection to Syria but does not assess it logical that Syria would have been involved in this attack. Bolani said that for some time Syria has suffered from international isolation, but recently avenues have begun to open with the U.S. administration, the European Union, and with other Arab states. Bolani argued it wouldn't make sense

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for Syria to jeopardize those new avenues by actively supporting such an attack. Bolani said this doesn't mean Syria should be forgiven for its other transgressions, including allowing terrorists to cross its border. Syria's mentality is that it needs to play a continuous role in Iraq, sometimes using this as an excuse to interfere with Iraq's democratic system.

Convincing Iraqi Political Leaders

¶ 17. (S//NF) Bolani told EmbOffs that he had presented the MOI evidence to the Iraqi National Security Council on August 30, briefing representatives of the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Justice, and the Joint Headquarters Chief of Staff on how the attacks were carried out, who planned and executed them, and how the MOI conducted its investigation. Bolani told the GOI leaders that those were the facts and it was up to them to decide whom to publicly accuse. Bolani opined to EmbOffs that the accusations against Ba'thists and Syria may have been political posturing for the upcoming national election, which reflects poorly on the government especially during election time. He told EmbOffs that the closer Iraq gets to the national election, the more political challenges will surface, and that the state's failure to listen to its appropriate institutions-such as its security experts-weakens the state as a whole.

¶ 18. (S//NF) Bolani criticized PM Maliki in particular, saying Bolani had advised Maliki to wait until a clear case could be built before making public pronouncements about the attack. Unfortunately, Bolani said, the PM's inner circle presented him with skewed information and he hastened to judgment. Bolani said that if the PM believed in sharing power and believed in GOI institutions, the response to the attack would have been handled differently. Instead, only three or four people close to the PM have influence with Maliki, and this hinders the effectiveness of the entire government.

Bolani's Political Future

¶9. (C) Pol MinCouns asked Bolani for his view of the current political scene and his own political party's plans. Bolani said that so far the only alliance declared for the national election is the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), a reprise of the winning coalition in 2005 including the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Sadrist, Ibrahim Jaafari and Ahmed Chalabi, but not Maliki. Bolani said he is not optimistic about this alliance. At the same time, Bolani said the INA members are in a stronger position than Maliki since they made their decision and announced it definitively, while Maliki continues to equivocate.

¶10. (C) Bolani said that his own party, the Constitutional Party, has two options: either to join a coalition of nationalist groups or to run in the election alone. He indicated that he would prefer a nationalist coalition including Sunnis, Shia, liberals, tribal groups, and others, as long as all seek to work for the interests of the Iraq as a whole. Bolani said he's been in contact with many other parties, as they all want to join forces with the Minister of Interior.

¶11. (S//NF) Comment: Bolani presented an image of confidence and competence, while painting Maliki as impulsive and reactive. It was predictable behavior for a key minister who one week earlier may have faced dismissal by the PM for paying insufficient attention to his security brief and focusing heavily on his personal political ambitions. It was also clear his political future remains very much on his mind. Nevertheless, Bolani's assessment of the August 19 attacks and those responsible largely conform to our own. We have had experts from the U.S. Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) Agency providing expert analysis of the two August 19 bomb sites to the Interior Ministry's National Intelligence and Information Agency (NIIA). The NIIA is also seeking ATF Advice on post blast site control and exploitation. End Comment.

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